

# NORTHERN PENNINES RURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

## *Introduction*

An organisation such as the Board, created by Parliament and financed from public funds, must operate through policies which are consistent with the views of the Government of the day. It cannot otherwise hope to be of benefit to the people it was meant to serve. Therefore, although the Minister of Agriculture had said in the House of Commons, on 6th July, that the Board was "a worthwhile experiment" it seemed appropriate, following the change of Government, to seek more positive assurances that it was working in ways acceptable to the wider national policy for agriculture as a whole. To this end the Chairman and Deputy Chairman were seen by the Minister of Agriculture early in September 1970. In the following January the Chairman was told that it had been decided to end the Board in March and this was confirmed by an announcement that:

"The Northern Pennines Rural Development Board cannot be justified under the Government's philosophy and the experiment of the Board will therefore be terminated." (Cmnd. 4564).

The Board itself issued the following Statement on 18th January:

"The Minister of Agriculture has today announced in Parliament that he plans to introduce an Order which, if approved, will end the Board's existence on 31 March 1971. The Board acknowledges the Minister's assurance that this decision is based upon the fact that the concept of such a Board, and particularly its power over land transfer, is alien to Government philosophy and is not a reflection upon the way in which the Board has sought to carry out the functions laid upon it by the Agriculture Act, 1967."

The appropriate Draft Order was laid before Parliament on 18 February 1971 to become effective on 31 March 1971 and was prayed against by the Opposition. A debate on the decision of Government took place in the House of Lords on 16 February 1971.

Much of the Board's work in the past year has been clouded by uncertainties over its future and in the last months of its existence its main concern has been to fulfil, as far as possible, the commitments it had already entered into and leave a minimum legacy to those who would have to conclude its unfinished business. There has also been the hiatus created by a Post Office strike. Our work under section 47 of the Agriculture Act, 1967 could not begin until mid-summer. This Report is not, therefore, a record of the Board at full stretch over a whole year.

## *Land Transfer (Section 49)*

We explained in our previous Report that the Board felt that there could be circumstances under which it would be right and sensible to withhold consent to a proposed transfer of land. We also drew attention to the restraints,

deriving in the main from the unhappy economic plight of hill farming, which made us chary of exercising this power. The Board did, in fact, intervene only once although there were a few other and later occasions when in our judgement intervention would have been equally justified. We did not do so, because of the political implications.

The one case was at High Oxque Farm, in the parish of Marrick, in Swaledale. This was a farm of 95½ acres, with long and very poor access, worked in two main blocks, with the outlying one more than a mile from the steading. Buildings and services were very poor. The whole area is tortured by fragmentation; one dairy farm of 63 acres is in nine parcels stretching over a wide area, of which three have no direct access to a public road. The Board knew nothing of the "sale" until its consent was sought to a device which would have perpetuated the very poor situation in the area. They felt that to grant it would have been wholly contrary to the intent of the Agriculture Act, 1967, and in accordance with section 49(6) notice was served by the vendor on 12 May 1970 requiring the Board itself to be the purchaser. Unfortunately, great difficulty was met in establishing an adequate Title in the vendor and the land did not finally come into the Board's possession until 6 January 1971. The farm had been bid to £4,700 in open auction and this was the price we paid. Offers were invited from adjacent landowners and at its last meeting, in March, the Board approved dispositions which at least made a small start towards improving structure around one village. The sum of the selling prices is £4,725. The case is not untypical of many other patterns of holdings throughout the Northern Pennines.

During the period of the Board's existence it has received more than 500 applications for consent to transfer. Almost half of these have led to some form of amalgamation. The process is particularly marked in the smallest units—those under 25 acres—where 124 out of 132 which came on to the market were absorbed into other farms. In all, there have been changes of ownership of some 37,000 acres, or just under 2% of the whole area, since November 1969 and of this about a third has been amalgamated. Details are given in the Appendix.

The Board has never felt that its purpose could best be achieved by a vigorous use of its power to refuse consent, and it approached the problem of structure by inviting collaboration from the professions who are concerned with land transactions. This was readily given and it was becoming usual for consultation with the Board's officers to take place before the details of a sale were announced. The Board's aim was the most sensible land use and in practice this amounted to the same thing as the vendor's aim which was to get the best price from the market. There was no inherent conflict and the Board could and frequently did influence the way in which farms were presented for sale.

#### *Purchase by the Board by Agreement (Section 48)*

We said in our first Report that we felt there might well be times when purchase by the Board, by agreement with a vendor, would be the only practical way of bringing about circumstances which would allow payments to be made to the outgoer under the Farm Amalgamations Scheme.

One such case happened at Brownsde Farm, of 65½ acres in Alston, which was bought on 11 March 1971. We have had insufficient time to negotiate a resale and ownership will revert to the Minister after 31 March 1971. We had also hoped that it would be possible to purchase another small farm in Teesdale, for similar reasons, and we had been approached by the owners of a large estate in Yorkshire with a view to tackling a most complex and unsatisfactory structure of largely part-time holdings over nearly 1,000 acres. Both these cases had to be abandoned.

#### *Boundary Adjustments (Section 51)*

No work was done by the Board under section 51 on the making of schemes for co-ordinated amalgamations and reshaping of agricultural units, although we think the action taken at High Oxque Farm could have sparked off some activity in that area.

#### *Afforestation (Section 53)*

During its existence the Board has granted 27 Licences. An appeal to the Minister of Agriculture by the licensee against conditions attached by the Board to the second stage of planting in Langstrothdale will lapse with the Board's demise. A further reference made by the Forestry Commission, questioning the Board's objection to the afforestation of Commonburn Farm, near Wooler, has not so far been resolved.

It cannot be denied that there are very real difficulties in creating proper balances between afforestation and amenity and agriculture. Trees, particularly conifers, can arouse passionate and not always wise reactions. It is remarkable that although one Planning Authority has persistently deplored our very existence because we had a power to permit afforestation, another has regretted our departure because there is no longer a statutory mechanism to prevent it. The quality of landscape, and the effects upon it of change, must be a subjective judgement and opinions will always vary. Our progress has been rendered the more difficult by the absence in the two National Parks which fell inside our area of any agreements made under the 1961 Voluntary Agreement procedure. Had it been possible for the planning, amenity, and land-owning interests to reach accord the Board stated publicly that it would have acted in concert other than in quite exceptional circumstances. The plight of sheep farming is such that the impetus towards private afforestation is bound to continue.

We have found it more possible to integrate afforestation with agriculture. This was the result of our good relations with the afforesters and their understanding of our concern to preserve in-bye land. For example, on a North Cumberland farm of nearly 400 acres, only 245 acres have been planted and the residue leased by the new owner to an adjoining farmer and a properly commercial unit created. In another case in the same area three holdings have been rearranged so that all the rough grazing, 558 acres, has been planted and the better land sold by the afforesters to neighbouring farms. One farm has gone, two have been improved.

Licences granted in the period under review are listed below:

			<i>Location and Parish</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
CUMBERLAND	...	...	Clargill Head, Alston	260
			The Lynes, Askerton	245
DURHAM	...	...	Burn Hill Farm, Lanchester and Wolsingham	450

		<i>Location and Parish</i>		<i>Acreage</i>
NORTHUMBERLAND ...	...	*Kidlandlee, Alwinton	...	132
YORKSHIRE, WEST RIDING ...		*Wry Gill, Garsdale	...	119
		*Blea Moor, Dent	...	390
		*Fell Bents, Dent	...	125
		*Greenfields, Buckden	...	600
		*Greenfields, Buckden	...	1,000

\* Area within a National Park.

#### *Grants under Section 47*

The conditions and criteria under which the Board could make payments under section 47 did not receive approval from the Treasury and the Ministry of Agriculture until June 1970. Until then we had not thought it wise to be energetic in seeking applications, and the flow of requests was hindered towards the end by the Post Office strike. We never did obtain agreement to our proposed conditions for assisting the improvement of public roads, where the need is urgent in some places.

We had not expected swift results but the response was encouraging and would have gathered pace. The most obvious benefit lay in the subsidy we could make in order to retain rural bus services. In Swaledale a local, private, operator who had run the services for 30 years decided that they had become so unprofitable that they must be withdrawn. This is a sparsely peopled district. The Board joined with the North Riding County Council and four Rural District Councils in offering a guaranteed annual subsidy sufficient to keep the services in existence. Our contribution was about £1,000 per annum. We have also been able to assist in Weardale, in County Durham, in Northumberland and in North Westmorland. We fear that some at least of these will now be at hazard, in an area where already poor communications are a grave social constraint.

By 31 March the Board had paid out or was committed to £34,862 under the following heads:

		£
(a) Farmhouse tourist accommodation	...	14,936
(b) Farm camping and caravan sites	...	15,870
(c) Mains services and telephones	...	1,658
(d) Rural bus services	...	2,398

#### *Finance*

In round figures it has cost £77,000 to run the Board over the twenty months since its inception. In addition we have spent £25,000 on capital items and these are assets which now revert to the Ministry of Agriculture; and £5,000 on grants.

#### *Staff*

The Board wishes to place on record its appreciation of the outstanding work of all members of its staff. Their number has not increased in this year and that so small a number managed to meet the many and different aspects of our work is itself tribute to their ability and devotion.

*Acknowledgements*

Whatever the Board has been able to do has depended upon the ready assistance of a large number of individuals and organisations. In particular we have been indebted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, both in London and in the Northern and Yorkshire and Lancashire Regions, the Planning Authorities for the National Parks and the County Councils with whom we are concerned, the Forestry Commission, the Countryside Commission, The Nature Conservancy, The National Farmers' Union, The Country Landowners' Association, the Timber Growers' Organisation, and the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers.

Tom Cowen

*Chairman*

Northern Pennines Rural Development Board,  
Ormside,  
Appleby, Westmorland  
31 March 1971.

## Land Transfer Cases

## Analysis of Applications for Consents

1 November 1969—31 March 1971

1. Number of Applications decided	...	...	...	...	516
2. Consents resulting in amalgamations:					
Exceeding 100 acres	...	...	32		
Between 50-100 acres	...	...	42		
Between 25-50 acres	...	...	46		
Less than 25 acres	...	...	128		
Total Acreage	...	...	...	12,398.658	
Total Numbers	...	...	...	...	248 ... 48.2%
3. Consents granted for ultimate afforestation:					
Exceeding 300 acres	...	...	4		
Between 100-300 acres	...	...	9		
Between 50-100 acres	...	...	1		
Less than 50 acres	...	...	4		
Total Acreage	...	...	...	8,639.782	
Total Numbers	...	...	...	...	18 ... 3.5%
4. Consents granted for commercial woodlands to be continued to be managed as such:					
Exceeding 300 acres	...	...	—		
Between 100-300 acres	...	...	—		
Between 50-100 acres	...	...	1		
Less than 50 acres	...	...	1		
Total Acreage	...	...	...	125.000	
Total Numbers	...	...	...	...	2 ... 0.2%
5. Consents granted for retention as a separate unit:					
Exceeding 100 acres	...	...	31		
Between 50-100 acres	...	...	23		
Between 25-50 acres	...	...	10		
Less than 25 acres	...	...	8		
Total Acreage	...	...	...	15,656.546	
Total Numbers	...	...	...	...	72 ... 13.9%
6. Consents granted because land was domestic rather than agricultural:					
Total Acreage	...	...	...	739.580	
Total Numbers	...	...	...	...	176 ... 34.2%
7. Applications refused					
...	...	...	...	...	1 ... 0.2%
8. Cases Inspected					
...	...	...	...	...	202 ... 39.1%

## Analysis of Consents by Local Authority Areas

Local authority area	Amalgamation	Afforestation	Commercial Woodlands	Retained as separate Unit	Domestic	Total
Glendale	...	—	—	—	—	—
Rothbury	...	—	—	1	1	2
Bellingham	...	2	—	1	—	3
Border	...	22	4	—	17	48
Haltwhistle	...	9	2	—	8	19
Hexham	...	8	—	2	8	18
Penrith	...	14	—	3	6	23
Alston with Garrigill	...	7	3	—	1	7
Lunesdale	...	—	—	—	—	—
Settle	...	18	1	—	4	10
Masham	...	—	—	—	—	—
Leyburn	...	4	—	—	4	1
North Westmorland	51	—	—	11	22	84
South Westmorland	12	—	—	6	4	22
Startforth	...	12	—	—	1	8
Sedbergh	...	7	6	—	3	6
Reeth	...	7	—	—	1	4
Aysgarth	...	18	—	—	4	13
Richmond	...	2	—	2	1	7
Barnard Castle	11	—	—	—	5	11
Weardale	...	14	—	—	3	11
Lanchester	...	—	—	—	2	1
Skipton	...	13	2	—	4	12
Wharfedale	...	—	—	—	1	5
Ripon and Pateley Bridge	14	—	—	—	9	14
Appleby M.B.	3	—	—	—	—	3
Total	...	248	18	2	72	176
						516

NORTHERN PENNINES  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Second Annual Report  
for the year ended 31 March 1971

*LONDON*  
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE  
1971



NORTHERN PENNINES  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
BOARD



NORTHERN PENNINES RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Ormside, Appleby, Westmorland

19th April, 1971.

Sir,

I have the honour to present the second, and last, Annual Report of The Northern Pennines Rural Development Board as required by section 53(1) of the Agriculture Act 1967. It covers the period from 1 April, 1970 to the end of the Board on 31 March, 1971.

I have to advise you that since the Report deals with activities up to 31 March and since the Board ceased to exist on that date it has not been possible for it to be approved by the Board.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant

Tom Cowen.

Tom Cowen,  
Chairman.

The Rt. Hon. James Prior, M.P.  
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food  
Whitehall Place  
London SW1

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